Cryptozoology, 8, 1989, 37–42
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THE CASE FOR A LEGAL INQUIRY INTO SASQUATCH EVIDENCE

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ABSTRACT: Consistent failure to persuade zoologists or anthropologists to investigate Sasquatch phenomena may be explained by the fact that most of the available evidence consists of eyewitness testimony, which scientists are not trained or accustomed to deal with. The professionals who *are* trained to evaluate testimony, and who take it very seriously, are lawyers. Since lawyers also dominate the political scene, where the purse strings of scientific research are held, the best way to achieve a scientific investigation may be to convince the lawyers first. To this end, a campaign for a judicial or legislative inquiry into the existing Sasquatch evidence is advocated.

INTRODUCTION

Individuals get involved with Sasquatch investigations for a variety of reasons. To some, it is just a matter of personal interest, independent of any consideration of the attitude of the society around them. At the other extreme, some see it as a chance to achieve fame, fortune, or both. To the first group, the question of whether the existence of the Sasquatch is established in their lifetime, or ever, may be of no concern, while in the second group, each individual is competing with all the others to produce the final proof him/herself. For anyone else to beat him or her to it may seem to represent absolute failure.

Between these extremes, however, are a number of individuals who, for whatever reasons, would like to see the existence of the Sasquatch established as an accepted fact. They slant a lot of their efforts towards that end, but, after all these years, they have very little to show for it. What has been done may not have been altogether wrong, but I would like to suggest that an alternate approach, one which could be a lot more productive, has been ignored.

What has been done is to try to persuade members of the scientific community, such as zoologists and anthropologists, that they should take the Sasquatch seriously and do something about it.

This is not an unreasonable approach. If the Sasquatch phenomenon does not involve a very interesting unknown animal, then it has to involve some exceedingly strange human behavior that has been going on worldwide and throughout history.

Either possibility is surely far more significant for humankind than many of the matters to which some members of the scientific community devote their careers, or at least substantial time and resources. It is only logical to

argue that the mass of Sasquatch material laymen have assembled should be sufficient to interest at least some scientists in taking up the matter. After so many years, however, it should be obvious that they are not going to do so. Therefore, why not try something else?

One of the basic problems faced in dealing with scientists is that the primary type of evidence that has been assembled on the Sasquatch, eyewitness testimony, is not the sort of data they are used to dealing with. They cannot replicate it. They cannot examine it in their laboratories. So they write it off as having no scientific value.

The Lawyers

Perhaps eyewitness testimony is not of much value. There are grounds for argument about that. But the important point here is that a certain professional segment of society does *not* consider it worthless. These people deal with testimony all the time, and, furthermore, consider it very important indeed. And this segment of society is not by any means insignificant or impotent. On the contrary, it is the most potent of all.

I refer, of course, to the legal profession. Lawyers set great store by testimony, and they use it to determine matters of the most vital importance, even to the extreme of deciding whether someone will live or die. A person can be executed on the basis of eyewitness testimony. Such testimony can also bankrupt a corporation, even a huge one, or send an individual, no matter how important, to the calaboose. Testimony is very powerful stuff.

But there is even more to it than that, because lawyers do not just run the court system; they usually run much of the government as well. A very high proportion of politicians are lawyers.

If enough politicians are convinced that Sasquatches should be taken seriously, they are in a position to tell the scientists: "Do something about this"—and some of them will do it gladly. Perhaps some scientists might find that last statement a bit offensive, but at least the politicians can tell the scientists: "Do something about this, and your research will be well-funded." I think it comes to about the same thing.

For that matter, the politicians could also tell the armed forces: "Take some of those fancy toys we are forever having to buy for you, and go and find one of these things." With the sophisticated sensing devices designed to monitor the movements of enemy soldiers, it ought to be relatively easy to track down an unsuspecting Sasquatch to his resting place; if there didn't happen to be a Sasquatch in the area at the time, it would still be a good training exercise for the troops.

The first question which may arise is: if the politicians can do such things, why are they not doing them already? After all, a lot of voters are known to take an interest in the Sasquatch, as well as in other kinds of cryptozoological reports. When the Smithsonian Institution co-sponsored a television program on the search for "monsters" some years back, it drew the top audience of the week; and when Harrison Hot Springs, a village of a few hundred people, proposed to stage a search for the Sasquatch, the whole world took notice (Green 1978: 50–51).

I suspect that the reason politicians have done nothing so far on the Sasquatch problem is that they have been getting bad advice. They have been asking the opinions of scientists instead of considering the matter themselves, not realizing that this is a subject which they are well equipped to deal with, while scientists are not.

An Official Inquiry

Maybe it is time to do something to change that. What I would like to propose is that a government, any major government, hold an official inquiry into the possible existence of the Sasquatch within its territory. A commission composed not primarily of scientists (although it would not hurt to have a few on the staff as technical advisers) but of judges, as we usually do in Canada, could be appointed; or there could be a committee of inquiry run by the politicians themselves, as seems to be favored in the United States.

There would, of course, be competent legal counsel assigned to the inquiry staff, and they could evaluate all potential submissions beforehand, assessing all the witnesses, whether they are volunteers or supplied from the files of the Sasquatch investigators, before putting them on the stand. I can guarantee there would no lack of witnesses. In fact, provided that their expenses are paid, I am sure the inquiry could be provided with a continuous supply of witnesses until they asked for the flow to stop.

The inquiry counsel could subject all witnesses to lie detector tests and to skillful cross-examination, and could investigate their testimony to their hearts' content. They could also have full evaluations by recognized authorities of any physical evidence that witnesses may submit, such as hair or fecal samples, or dermal ridges on footprint casts (Krantz 1983). They could have photographs, including the Patterson film, computer-enhanced and otherwise thoroughly analyzed by appropriate experts. They could do all the things Sasquatch researchers have wanted to have done for years, but could never afford.

When certain accounts indicate that there is an area where it might be possible to find further evidence, that could also be investigated. At the same time, if there are people who want to make a case that Sasquatches do not exist, or to challenge any particular testimony, they could also testify—after being put through the same wringer as the other witnesses.

Presumably, such a process would weed out a lot of accounts and a lot of people, either because an account did not stand up to thorough scrutiny or

because a witness had not seen anything that seemed sufficiently significant. There would still be plenty of witnesses left, thoroughly tried, tested, and evaluated, to keep the committee members listening until they tired of it.

And they would have to conclude that Sasquatches do exist. They could not reach any other conclusion. At least they could not do so without admitting that the processes by which they make so many other important decisions are so flawed that they should not be used at all.

Other Factors

This would all cost money, of course; a lot of it. But would anyone reasonably argue that it would be money wasted? For those who think it would be a waste, would it be as much of a waste as the inquiry held in Canada recently which attempted to determine whether top athletes use steroids? That commission heard testimony for months, and it finally found someone willing to testify about what everyone has surely known all along: that most world-class, medal-winning athletes have used steroids, because if they did not, very few of them would be winning medals! Could a Sasquatch inquiry be more of a waste of money than that?

Whatever government decided to hold this inquiry would be sure of getting something of real value for its money. It would get publicity. Officials in the Washington State government in Olympia already know that the Sasquatch is good value for publicity, or they would not have adopted it as the official State Animal for the 1989 Centennial Year.

We can be sure that any government that sets up an inquiry into the existence of the Sasquatch could count on worldwide attention. And if they were not capable of turning that attention to good use by convincing people that a place which may be inhabited by Sasquatches is an interesting place to visit, then they could bring in some advisers from Scotland's Loch Ness to show them how.

There is, of course, a fairly obvious reason why politicians might be reluctant to get involved in the Sasquatch question, and that is because they would fear the effect of ridicule by their political opponents. There are at least two ways to get around that. One would be to persuade both the major political parties to commit their support. Another would be to involve more than one government, either by lining up two American states or Canadian provinces (preferably with governments on opposite sides of the political fence), or by making it an international inquiry, with both Canadian and U.S. jurisdictions involved.

Actually, I do not think there would be any political risk. I think too many people would be really interested in the testimony, and in the outcome, for the responsible politicians to have anything to fear. In this connection, the International Society of Cryptozoology's symposium "Sasquatch Evidence: Scientific and Social Implications," hosted by Washington State University

in June of 1989 (at which this paper was originally presented) did not result in any ridicule for that institution. Neither did that happen in 1978 when the University of British Columbia sponsored the conference "Sasquatch and Similar Phenomena," which, in fact, resulted in the publication of an important volume (Halpin and Ames 1980).

I realize that what I am proposing may seem peculiar to many readers. I can only emphasize that I know what I am talking about. As a newspaperman assigned to cover courts, I spent a lot of time with lawyers; and as a party politician I have had a close look at how government works, and, in Canada at least, I know a lot of the people who make it work. Their titles may be different in the United States, but I am sure that the people are much the same.

How to Start It?

This approach is practical. It is far more practical, in my opinion, than trying to interest some zoologist—who never sees animals of any sort except through a microscope, or who only simulates their behavior or ecology through computer models—who knows he will be frowned on by his superiors and perhaps ridiculed by his colleagues if he gets involved.

How does one go about getting this started? Perhaps I am giving it something of a start right now. Beyond that, eloquent individuals could contact state, provincial, or national representatives and sound them out on the subject. If they show any interest at all, one could get them together with some solid Sasquatch witnesses.

If they do not help, one could go up the line, trying for a meeting with a whole caucus, or with the ministers, or deputy ministers—or secretaries or undersecretaries—of the departments most concerned. Those responsible for promoting tourism might be more ready to listen than those dealing with science, but whoever one tries, *one should ensure that one is talking to lawyers.*

If the direct approach does not work, one could try the media instead. A favorable column or editorial could do a great deal to ease any fears the politicians might have. One might even be able to get a few scientists to speak out in favor of this approach, since it does not really require them to do anything.

This approach may not succeed right away, but all it would take would be persistence. For 30 years, Sasquatch researchers have attempted to get scientists to pay attention to eyewitness testimony, something they just do not feel comfortable with. It should not take even a small fraction of that time to find lawyer/politicians somewhere who are completely at home with testimony, and who know the value of being in the spotlight. Perhaps such an approach could get the Sasquatch question settled once and for all.

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